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Media Release

Surprise party marks 25 years of supporting babies and their families

Staff threw a surprise party to celebrate 25 years of a vital community outreach service which has supported thousands of babies cared for in the neonatal unit at the Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust.

Guest of honour was Cath Ould, Neonatal Community Sister, who has been there since the Community Neonatal Outreach Service launched, and has seen it grow to help thousands of families.

The service provides care and support to babies that have been looked after in the Dyson Centre for Neonatal Care and who still need additional support in the first few weeks or months at home.

The team visits families once they are home from hospital to provide help with things like feeding and nursing care. They also provide practical and emotional support for parents and can signpost families to professional support services.

Cath said: "It's a great job, so rewarding and I'm very proud of the work we do.

"We aim to act as a bridge between hospital and home for those babies who have had to have a bit of extra care in our neonatal unit.

"While helping babies to thrive when they have left the RUH and are back home, a key part of what we do is supporting parents, many of whom will have been through a very worrying time. Providing them with emotional support is very important."

Cath said that the biggest change she'd seen to the service over the years was how much it had grown.

“Apart from covering a bigger area, we also offer support to more babies than we ever have – around 90 families a year.

“We are also providing even more at-home support, such as nasogastric feeding, to help families get back to the comfort of their own homes as soon as possible.”

Mary Spence, Neonatal Outreach Nurse, said: “I have learned so much from working with Cath. It is truly a privilege to be able to care for the families in their homes and see the babies grow and thrive after their time in the Neonatal Unit.”

To mark the service’s 25th birthday, Cath was thrown a surprise party attended by former colleagues and Maria Kelleher, whose daughter Alisha had been cared for by the team.

Maria, from Midsomer Norton, said: “Words truly can’t capture how incredible the RUH’s Neonatal Outreach Service has been for us. From the very first moment we brought Alisha home, Mary and Cath have gone above and beyond in every way. Their passion and dedication shine through in everything they do, and it’s clear how much they genuinely care.

“Alisha absolutely adores them you can see it in her smiles and it’s just as obvious how deeply they care for her too. The support, kindness, and reassurance they’ve given us have made a lasting impact that we will carry with us forever.

“They are so much more than a service to us they’ve become like family, and we will always be grateful for everything they’ve done.”

The Community Neonatal Outreach Service regularly receives great feedback from the families they support.

Another parent, Frances Lee, from Lacock, said: “Going home with our little one needing oxygen was incredibly daunting, however the outreach team are such a source of support and help.

“Always professional, kind and knowledgeable, as well as regular visits, I’ve felt able to reach out when I’ve had any worries. We feel really grateful for having that extra support after such a difficult journey.”

When the service was first set up in 2001 it started as a pilot project serving just Bath and Trowbridge. However, over the years it has expanded to take in the whole of the RUH catchment area.

Just last year, the outreach service introduced at-home tube feeding, helping parents to feed their babies through tubes at home. This includes nasogastric feeding for babies who are unable to take in enough milk on their own. Babies are given milk through a small tube, which passes through the baby’s nose, down the back of their throat and directly into their stomach.

Ends

Notes to Editor:

At the RUH we're proud to put people at the heart of what we do, striving to create an environment where everyone matters. Everyone means the people we care for, the people we work with and the people in our community.

We provide a wide range of services including medicine and surgery, services for women and children, accident and emergency services, and diagnostic and clinical support services.

We also provide specialist services for rheumatology, chronic pain and chronic fatigue syndrome/ME via the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases which we acquired in 2015.

In 2021, we acquired Sulis Hospital Bath, an independent hospital that provides care for both private and NHS patients. This has enabled us to provide more care for NHS patients, as well as continuing to provide private care to those who choose it. Any additional income earned through private care is reinvested in services for the benefit of the people we care for at both Sulis and the RUH.

Our new Dyson Cancer Centre brings together many of the RUH's cancer services under one roof to provide a cancer services hub for over 500,000 people in the South West. The centre includes the RUH's oncology, chemotherapy and radiotherapy services, a 22-bed inpatient ward, a dedicated pharmacy, research team and nuclear medicine and physics teams.

A key feature of the new centre is the Macmillan Wellbeing Hub. The three-storey hub provides a welcoming, non-clinical space designed around the needs of patients and their families. It also includes comfortable accommodation where relatives and loved ones can stay overnight.

We work closely with other health and care organisations as members of the Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care Board. We strive to improve the health and wellbeing of the people in our community by working together build one of the healthiest places to live and work.

We are rated 'Good' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

For more information about the Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust visit: www.ruh.nhs.uk